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REPORT

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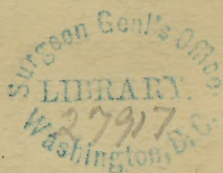
SELF POLLUTION

IN CHILDREN.

By H. P. AYRES, M. D., FORT WAYNE, IND.

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# SELF POLLUTION IN CHILDREN.

BY H. P. AYRES, M.D., OF FORT WAYNE, IND.

Man is capacitated for high moral and social positions; as these principles permeate his character, he approximates the "likeness" of Deity; as they are supplanted by vice and degradation, he sinks to a brutish existence. Degradation in men does not appear so loathsome as it does in children; for the child should ever have a halo of joy and hope around it, and the blight of pollution should not mar its day. The work of the philanthropist and physician would be pleasant if their duties only related to the sick and wounded among the good, but when they must descend to contend with vices, and vile pollutions of the body, and with their results, there is something repulsive and forbidding to every sensitive mind. This feeling does not arise simply from the contact with filth itself, but is felt in such cases where the mind or soul sinks into a vortex of ruin with the body, and the hitherto intellectual being becomes a driveling, repulsive, demented idiot. It is when the mind by vice is torn from its high throne of godlike superiority, and shames the lowest order of the brute creation in knowledge and virtue, that the heart recoils and turns away. But while we shrink from such contact and loathe the subject, duty overrides our objection, and we enter upon it for the good of those who are or may be slaves to self pollution. Masturbation, or self pollution, is among the prevailing evils of our land. Drunkenness, adultery, and foeticide are considered blighting vices or crimes; the press, philanthropy, and religion raise their voices against them, but the vice of self pollution among children is quite forgotten, is seldom mentioned or referred to by these public guardians of morality, and the viper is permitted to fatten upon some of the brightest buds of intellectual promise in our homes, leaving but a skeleton of that which was beautiful and lovely.

In a subject of so much importance, and embracing such a wide range of thought, we can only notice three or four points, and give them but a limited discussion.

Our principal object is to call attention to the vice of self pollution among children, yet we may occasionally be general in our observations. We sometimes forget that mere children may become addicted to this vice, and not unfrequently attribute to other causes sickness, which is the outgrowth of masturbation alone. I have had cases in which the symptoms of disease resembled those of onanism, and yet the childlike form of my patient almost forbade the thought of such a habit. I have sometimes been sorry to receive an affirmative answer from such children, in confirmation of my suspicions, or to communicate the fact, when necessary, to unsuspecting parents. It may be asked, is there a sufficient maturity in the child to experience all the sensations of puberty? We answer no; yet there is a sensation of such a character that the health and brain of the child are affected, and where a child forms the habit the most disastrous results follow. What this sensation is, or what the secretions are, if any, would occupy too much time to discuss, and fall short of our present purpose.

#### SYMPTOMS.

The symptoms are, as in other diseases, numerous, and as varied in their types as are the constitutions and circumstances under which the vice exists; yet the symptoms are generally so marked that we are seldom mistaken.

I have remarked, the vice commences in children at a very early age, before there is much development of muscle or hardening of the bones; all parts of the organism are in a formative state; the various functions of nutrition and consolidation are busy, perfecting the structure that the subject may be a perfect man, not only in body but in mind; thereby presenting a harmonious whole, worthy the divine hand from which it originated. Any shock to this growth and development, and especially that of masturbation, must for a time suspend the process of nutrition; and a succession of such shocks will blast both body and mind, and terminate in perpetual vacuity. It has undoubtedly come under the observation of all physicians of any considerable experience, that many children fall victims to this terrible evil. From health and vigor, and intelligence and loveliness of character, they become thin and pale and cadaverous; their amiability and loveliness departed, and in their stead irritability, moroseness and anger were prominent character-



istics. The quiet demeanor was exchanged for restlessness, sleeplessness, and excitement; instead of the playful, cheery, blythesome child, it forsook its accustomed plays and joyous sportings for seclusion, or perhaps melancholy. Instead of buoyant hopefulness, there were gloomy anticipations; and the past, instead of being remembered with childish gusto, was dwelt upon with mopish coldness. The forehead, once high and intellectual, appeared lower and narrower; the eyes, once beaming with joy, were cold and unsettled, or with shame dropped from, and avoided the gaze of the nearest and dearest friend; the once full round face lost its charms, the tongue was slow of utterance; the joyous bound of childish vigor changed to a slow, pensive, tottering gait, the whole body changed, and the child appeared as a monument of some desolating plague. The mind failed with the body; this purer principle of our nature can not shine in a tenement made uncongenial by vice and pollution. The desolation of self pollution does not stop in the ruin of the child; one of the lights of a home has gone out; the hearty boisterous laugh, the noisy clattering feet, the singing and whistling are hushed; the stillness of a burial day reigns in the household, for a pall has been drawn over its joys and charms. I have in my memory a beautiful child; lovely, amiable, fascinating, and joyous in all the outbursts of life. I have seen all these pleasing characteristics fall before the blight of masturbation. I saw the tints and charms of young life, in a blithesome child of fifteen, steadily fade away; the plump, full face become cadaverous; the limbs become bony, skinny appendages to a wasted body; mind and body sink, until the remains of her once beautiful person found their resting place in the grave. I have recently had under my care two boys, about twelve years old, who have been epileptics from onanism; another case of a young man nearly blind with amaurosis; another, in which the person is entirely blind, without any hope of sight. Children, five, ten, or fifteen years old, often become slaves to the vice. The curse invades the home of many unsuspecting parents; it carries its blight into our schools and places of learning; with remorseless greed it destroys the soul and body of many sons and daughters. Children addicted to the vice carry the marks of their degradation in the faces or their actions.

Lallemand observes: \* "However young the children may be, they get thin, pale, or irritable, and their features become haggard; their sleep is short, and most complete marasmus comes on; they may die

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\*Vol. 1, p. 462.

if their evil passion is not got the better of; nervous symptoms set in, such as spasmodic contraction; or partial or entire convulsive movements, such as epilepsy, eclampsia, and a species of paralysis, accompanied with contraction of the limbs." The same author further remarks: \* "When a child who has once shown signs of a good memory, and of considerable intelligence, is found to evince a greater difficulty to retain or comprehend what he is taught, we may be sure that it does not depend upon the same cause, only the intellectual functions become in the most marked manner enfeebled."

† "However young they may be, children lose flesh, and become pale, irritable, morose, and passionate; their sleep is short, disturbed, and broken; they fall into a state of marasm, and at length die, if not prevented from persevering in their course. . . . . But in infancy more or less severe nervous symptoms are superadded, which are not found in those who have commenced the practice after puberty, or which at least are not in the latter case manifested to the same extent. Such are spasms, and partial or general convulsions, eclampsia, epilepsy, and paralysis, accompanied with contraction of the limbs. These phenomena were present in all the children whose cases I have noticed, and numerous similar facts have been published by different authors."

While such are some of the common symptoms of masturbation, there are others which precede them, and are observable from the inception of the vice to the sad and unhappy termination of many cases.

The appetite suddenly or slowly becomes capricious—at one time insatiable, and at another entirely wanting, or only satisfied with some dainty and indigestible food. The meal is followed by distress or colicky pains; the child is restless, throwing itself on the floor, or assuming a mopish, abstracted condition; preferring a silent corner or lonely retreat to the usual romps of children. Sometimes an early symptom is the disagreement of the food with the stomach, thus injuring the process of digestion, cutting off the supply of nutrition; and, as an inevitable result, the child loses its flesh and becomes pale and weak. But such results may not always attend this vice among children. Some retain all their flesh, and for a while all their vigor, and perhaps their cheerfulness. The first symptom is an occasional stiffening of the child while in bed, which only lasts a half minute; this symptom gradually increases, until a

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\*Page 165.

†Lallemand and Wilson, p. 153.



spasm is fully developed. If this state is permitted to go on, the attacks commence in the daytime, and under any circumstances. At first, by a sudden stopping of the child, a stiffening of the arms and body; the eyes become fixed, the face has a vacant expression; but, in a moment, the child seems to awake, and silently passes on. These attacks become longer, and their interval shorter, until the subject becomes a confirmed epileptic.

Occasionally we see the first symptoms in the hurried and laborious breathing of the child; it avoids the excitement and play, the running and rollicking of other children, and when compelled to move rapidly the effort is followed by repeated sighing, from an inability to fully inflate the lungs.

Sometimes the heart sympathizes largely with the general debility, leading us at times to suspect an organic disease of the organ—a supposition, however, easily corrected, as the throbbing and irregularities of the heart are traceable to the drain and strain upon the nervous system. In such cases there is great loss of muscular strength, the body and limbs tremble; there is unsteadiness in the body, an irregularity and uncertainty in walking, so much so that the child stands unsteadily or moves with a tottering gait. Patients long addicted to self pollution sometimes lose sensibility in one hand or foot, or a portion of the face or chest. Pains are experienced in different parts of the body, closely resembling those of rheumatism, but are different in character; they generally run the course of the nerves, but are usually felt in the lumbar or sacral regions. These pains are more severe in the morning, but abate as the day advances.

The eye is so intimately connected with the nervous system, and so quickly suffers from any excess, that we are not surprised to see the conjunctiva deeply inflamed, the tears standing on the margin of the lids, and the corners of the eye filled with matter. Masturbation soon affects the globe of the eye; the pupil enlarges, the vision becomes dim, objects are seen double, and soon complete amaurosis supervenes.

Unnatural wakefulness in children may be symptomatic of self pollution. The child who romps and plays through the day sleeps sweetly and soundly through the night. If, however, they are wakeful and silent—and other concurring symptoms being present—we may well be on our guard in reference to the patient, before a brutalizing vice has been fully developed. Dr. Wilson mentions a case of a child seven years old, who for months laid awake to practice this debasing vice, while other children slept. Children who follow or habituate themselves to masturbation are usually wakeful,

yet sometimes they may have a lethargic or heavy sleep. The memory soon shows symptoms of defectiveness; the child becomes forgetful, careless, and stupid; its duties, obligations, and songs are quite forgotten; the tongue is thick, the articulation indistinct; and the once brilliant child sinks rapidly into vacuity or idiocy. Dr. Wilson says: \* "I have seen children, previously very intelligent, almost suddenly fall into a state of idiocy, the cause of which was little suspected, on account of their early age, the other functions not suffering proportionately. When a child, after having afforded evidence of strong intellect and memory, experiences from day to day more difficulty in retaining what he is taught, we may rest assured that this does not arise from indisposition, or from idleness, as is often supposed. On the other hand, the slow but progressive derangement of his health, his constantly increasing loss of activity and application, arise from the same cause. The intellectual faculties are simply the first to feel disorder, and show it more than others. In such cases, diminished aptness for learning ought to be held quite sufficient evidence to induce inquiry and careful watching. Correct information would clearly show why some children cease to carry off the prizes of their class; and why, at a later period, some young men fail in studying the law, medicine, or the sciences, after having successfully commenced such studies." We would willingly leave this part of our subject here, and permit each person to gather for himself the volume of symptoms which follow in the wake of this destroying fiend, but duty requires us to refer to symptoms of masturbation in insanity.

Several writers on the mind, in treating of insanity, give the same symptoms we find in those children and youth who indulge in self abuse: melancholy, solitude, apprehension of evil, distrust of friends, are among the evidences of approaching aberration, all of which are frequently the outgrowths of a secret vice, formed while in childhood.

The recital of the symptoms in this terrible vice is sickening; no part of the physical system escapes; many symptoms of other diseases are assimilated in results growing out of self pollution. The sin is so deep and blighting, so wide spreading in its destruction of soul and body, that God and nature and men revolt at its presence, and look upon it as one of the darkest blights which can fall upon the unsuspecting child.

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\* Wilson on Spermatorrhœa, p. 290.



There is another species of this vice which may be called *moral onanism*. It is possible without bodily pollution; but it exhausts in a dreadful manner also. I here allude to heating and filling the imagination with obscene and lascivious ideas, and a vicious and habitual propensity to indulge in such thoughts. This evil may at length become a real disease of the mind; the imagination is then totally corrupted, and governs the whole soul; nothing is interesting to men subject to it but what relates to lewdness; the slightest impression of that kind excites in them a general fervor and irritation; their whole existence is a continual fever, which weakens the more as it always stimulates without gratification.

#### CAUSES.

Dr. Hufeland, in his work on the "Art of prolonging life," after speaking of the various means of shortening life, says:

"It appears that between both these organs, that of the soul (the brain) and those of generation, as well as between the two functions, that of thinking and that of generating, the one spiritual and the other physical creation, there is a very intimate connection; and that they both require the noblest and most refined part of the vital power. We find, therefore, that they both act alternately on each other, and have a mutual and contrary effect. The more we strain the mental faculties, the less vigorous will be our power of generation; the more we stimulate the generative power and waste its juices, the more does the soul lose its faculty of thought, its energy, its acuteness, and its memory. Nothing in the world can so much and so irretrievably ruin the brightest mental talents as excess of this kind."

If Hufeland's observations were true in his day, may not the same be said with greater truth of the present time, when the mind of the child is fed by the stories and incidents of thoughtless, obscene servants, illustrated libertinism, or the corrupting "yellow literature" of our book stores. Many children, from the earliest development of their intellectual powers, are surrounded by influences calculated to blast all future hopes and prospects, and fit them rather for dens of wickedness and a world of despair.

The child, like the man, is influenced by surrounding circumstances, whether they are good or bad. The natural relish or congeniality of our natures for the bad, leads the vast multitude in that direction. The French Revolution, and the revolution of Seventy-six in the United States, were not so productive of immoral sentiment among all classes as is the so called literature of the present

day. The demoralizing, corrupting sentiments are so inlaid with marvellous and thrilling narration that the poison is swallowed without a moral antidote, and the whole moral man is tainted if not ruined by the blighting contact. If what is called "yellow literature" were the only destroyer of a high moral status, we might be silent, for parents can control it; but there are other streams more corrupting and disastrous, from which children daily drink in the most copious draughts, and thus silently and successfully undermine all moral teachings, thereby destroying not only the future promise of a young and brilliant mind, but blasting the fond anticipations of many parents.

The majority of our bookstores and paper stands sell the most corrupting trash, illustrated with pictures of voluptuous females, which a few years ago would have shamed the "Five Points" of New York, and caused their expulsion even from such a hell. There is a law prohibiting the sale of lascivious books and pictures; once they could only be sold clandestinely, but now nude female forms, lascivious positions of male and female, representations of scenes in brothels, of debauchery, of dissipation, and murder, are exhibited without shame or hindrance. But this is not all. In these stores, and around these stands, are little boys and girls eight, ten, or fourteen years old, drinking in these seeds of corruption, which will germinate with a luxurious growth, and shoot out their poison like the fabled upas or the deadly adder, destroying not only the child in which it takes root, but from it sending forth a baneful poison to pollute and ruin many others. Such are some of the causes operating in towns and cities upon the minds of children, and producing the blighting curse of self abuse or masturbation, which is annually destroying thousands of youth, by unfitting them for any physical or intellectual employment.

Dr. Wilson relates a case of self pollution, of a most melancholy nature, in a young man of high intellectual and social promise, who gradually sank to the lowest depths of beastly pollutions, and all traceable to the reading of a single book. He says:

"I have related a case, a few pages back, in which nocturnal pollutions were caused by reading an obscene book. I have seen a multitude of cases of this nature. From these, I conclude that in certain very excitable individuals, reading such books, the sight of voluptuous images, lascivious conversation—in a word, all things that can excite or keep up irritation in the spermatic organs, are capable of producing the same effects as actual abuse, even when the will is



sufficiently powerful to prevent the thoughts from leading to the acts."

Dr. Howe, of Boston, Mass., in one of his reports on idiocy, remarks: "In some families which are degraded by drunkenness and vice, there is a degree of combined ignorance and depravity, which disgraces humanity. It is not wonderful that feeble minded children are born in such families; or, being born, that many of them become idiotic. Out of this class domestics are sometimes taken by those in better circumstances, and they make their employers feel the consequences of suffering ignorance and vice to exist in the community."

There are cases recorded where servant women, who had the charge of little girls, deliberately taught them habits of self abuse, in order that they might exhaust themselves, and go to sleep quietly! This has happened in private houses as well as the alms houses; and such little girls have become idiotic!

The mind instinctively recoils from giving credit to such atrocious guilt; nevertheless, it is there, with all its hideous consequences.

On the subject of insanity, in Dr. Copland's Dictionary of Practical Medicine, the writer, speaking of its causes, remarks: "Of these, the most influential are masturbation and libertinism or sexual excesses, sensuality in all its forms, and inordinate indulgence in the use of intoxicating substances and stimulants. The baneful influences of the first of these causes is very much greater, in both sexes, than is usually supposed; and is, I believe, a growing evil, with the diffusion of luxury, of precocious knowledge, and the vices of civilization. It is even more prevalent in the female than in the male sex; and in the former it usually occasions various disorders connected with the sexual organs: as, leucorrhœa, displacement of the uterus; difficult, disordered, suppressed, or profuse menstruation; both regular and irregular hysteria, catalepsy, ecstasies, vertigo, and various states of disordered sensibility, before it gives rise to mental disorder. In both sexes, epilepsy often precedes insanity from this cause; and either it or general paralysis often complicates the advanced progress of the mental disorder, when thus occasioned. Melancholia, the several grades of dementia, especially imbecility and monomania, are the more frequent forms of derangement proceeding from a vice which not only prostrates the physical powers, but also impairs the intellect, debases the moral affections, and altogether degrades the individual in the scale of social existence, even when manifest insanity does not arise from it."

In the Thirteenth Annual Report of the Massachusetts State Lunatic Asylum, voluntary insanity is attributed to two causes—

intemperance, and masturbation or secret vice. "The secret vice produces the very worst forms of insanity. Such patients become degraded animals, so entirely abandoned to the habit that hopeless dementia generally follows." When the mind is thus dethroned, and there is no appeal to the person through the moral sense, the brutish vice holds the ascendancy over the body, until the former human child becomes degraded below the brutes.

It is a matter of interest to know how young children may be subjects to this vice.

Undoubtedly there can not be a discharge from the child of the same character as there is at the time of puberty; but that they are susceptible to an excitement of a similar character, which in all its effects is as ruinous as absolute self pollution, there can be no doubt. The evidence to substantiate the position is so abundant, and of such a high character, that argument is unnecessary; the observations of Deslandes, Halle, Lallemand, Aeton, Wilson, and the confessions of Rousseau, are sufficient to satisfy any doubts. The precise physiological character of such excitement in children, and the effect upon the brain and nerves, are unknown, and whatever theories may be advanced, the entire subject is yet open to investigation. The subject has been referred to in another part of this paper, in which nurses have taken advantage of mere infants to titillate the organs of generation, that they might be quieted or go to sleep.

Children of a very early age may be seen tickling their genitals in order to produce some pleasurable sensation. Lallemand mentions one, who commenced at four years old, and soon became a perfect slave to the vice. I know many will ignore this position, and many parents will be indignant at any insinuation involving the virtue of a child, but it makes the fact no less patent. The names I mentioned a few lines back agree that children may commence at four years old, more frequently at six or eight, still more frequently between eight and sixteen. It is not necessary that a child should or does use its hand upon the genitals, in order to produce the sensation and all the evils of masturbation. The effect may be brought about by certain positions, such as sleeping on the belly, getting astride some bar or stick, some position on chairs or benches. A case is mentioned in which the child resorted to sliding down the balustrade or stairway, the friction brought on emission; another child pulled out the navel, which produced a pleasurable sensation without emission, but all the sad results of masturbation. Another boy suspended himself by the arms, from doors, casings, or whatever would answer his purpose, by which means he accomplished his gratifica-



tion, and also destroyed his health; another titillated the organs of generation with sticks and straws; another would sleep upon his belly; thus children, early and unconsciously, adopt measures which do not attract the attention of parents until wasting health leads to inquiry and investigation.

#### EFFECTS.

There are many young persons, male and female, who commenced life with more than an ordinary share of natural ability; they prosecuted their studies with great success, and gave high promise of being ornaments to the world, but are now moping, slaving idiots of the lowest order, or inmates of some insane asylum. Self abuse has so far overstrained and dissolved the nerve tissue, that the body is no longer a congenial abode for the mind. The harmony is broken; the refrain, however sweet, finds no response in the soul, for the nerve cords are unstrung, and the sweet harmony of mind and the senses is no longer heard. The person is insane.

Dr. Lallemand remarks: "How much glory has been lost, how many a noble career has been blighted, how many an unexpected suicide, and how many a fit of despair, would cease to be an impenetrable mystery to families and medical men, did we know better than we do the influence of excessive fatigue on the brain, on the production of involuntary seminal emissions, and that still more powerful action of these enervating evacuations, reacting on the cerebral functions!" The evidences of the effects upon the child are not always immediately developed. When there is a vigorous constitution, without any congenital or mechanical injury, the habit of masturbation may be indulged in for months without any special development of its injurious effects, until the patient is suddenly seized with spasm and all the developments of the outcropping evils of masturbation. There are other cases of slow development, in which the spasm is only a sudden stopping of the child, a fixedness of the eyes, a momentary rigor, all only lasting a few seconds, and the child moves on apparently unconscious of the fact. But these milder forms of disease soon develop into the full manifestations of this terrible evil, and in either emergency the mind and body soon fall in the general ruin.

Dr. Lewis says: "Young persons addict themselves to this practice without knowing the enormity of the crime, and all the consequences which physically result from it. The mind is affected by all the diseases of the body, but particularly by those arising from this cause. The most dismal melancholy, indifference, and aversion

to all pleasures, the impossibility to take part in conversation, the sense of their own misery, the consciousness of having brought it upon themselves, the necessity of renouncing the happiness of marriage, all affect them so much that they renounce the world—blessed if they escape suicide.”

Dr. Howe, speaking of the evil of masturbation, says: “There is another vice, a monster so hideous in mien, so disgusting in feature, altogether so beastly and loathsome, that in very shame and cowardice it hides its head by day, and, vampire like, sucks the very life blood from its victim by night. What is the loss of property, or the poison of serpents, compared with that pollution of body and soul, that utter extinction of reason, and that degradation of beings made in God’s image, to a condition which is beastly, and which is so often the consequence of excessive indulgence in this vice. It can not be that such loathsome wrecks of humanity, as men and women reduced to driveling idiocy by this cause, should be permitted to float upon the tide of life without some useful purpose; and the only one we can conceive is that of awful beacons to make others avoid, as they would eschew moral pollution and death, the course which leads to such ruin.” As we have before quoted, persons upon whom this crime is confirmed become lost to all reason, to all moral sense, to all shame—idiots who have but one thought, one wish, one passion, and that is the further indulgence in the habit which has loosed the silver cord even in their early youth, which has already wasted, and, as it were, dissolved the fibrous part of their bodies, and utterly extinguished their minds. If only such lost and helpless wretches existed, it would be a duty to cover them charitably with the veil of concealment, and hide them from the public eye, as things too hideous to be seen; but alas! they are only the most unfortunate members of a large class. They have sunk down into the abyss toward which thousands are tending. The vice which has shorn these poor creatures of the fairest attributes of humanity, is acting upon others, in a less degree indeed, but still most injuriously; enervating the body, weakening the mind, and polluting the soul. A knowledge of the extent to which this vice prevails would astonish and shock many. It is indeed a pestilence which walketh in darkness, because, while it saps and weakens all the higher qualities of the mind, it so strengthens the low cunning and deceit that the victim goes on in his habit unsuspected, until he is arrested by some one whose practiced eye reads his sin in the very means he takes to conceal it, or until all sense of shame is forever lost in the night of idiocy, with which his day so easily closes.



Dr. Hufeland, speaking of the effects of masturbation, says:

“Horrid is the impression stamped by nature on such an offender! He is like a faded rose, a tree blasted in its bloom, a wandering skeleton. All his fire and spirit are deadened by this detestable vice; and nothing remains but debility, languor, livid paleness, a withered body, and a degraded soul. The eyes lose their luster and strength; the rosy complexion of youth vanishes, and the visage appears of a pale white leaden color. The whole body becomes affected, and sensible to the slightest impression; the muscular power is lost; sleep brings with it no refreshment; every movement is attended with torture; the legs can no longer support the body; the hands tremble; aching pains arise in all the limbs; the faculty of thought is deranged, and cheerfulness is banished. The unhappy sufferer speaks little, and as it were only by force; and all his former liveliness of mind is depressed. A youth endowed by nature with genius and talents becomes dull or totally stupid; the mind loses all taste for virtuous and exalted ideas; and the imagination is altogether corrupted. The slightest circumstance respecting a female excites in him desire, shame, horror, and repentance; and despair of his evils being cured renders his misery complete. The whole life of such a man is a continued succession of secret reproach; painful sensations, arising from the consciousness of having brought upon himself internal weakness; irresolution, and disgust of life; and it need excite no surprise that such an unhappy wretch should at length become a self-murderer; for no man is so much exposed to suicide as an onanist.”

If more demonstrative evidences of the vile effects of masturbation were asked, we might refer to the insane asylums in all parts of this country, and indeed in the entire civilized world. The reports of these institutions fully confirm the hideous results of the vice. In our own State, in one report of our Insane Asylum, there were 159 cases of masturbation in 4,431; in another, 76 in 2,587; in another, 20 in 570; in another, 21 in 739; in another, 41 in 1,500; in another, 28 in 1,000.

In the Twelfth Report of the Massachusetts State Lunatic Asylum there are 139 cases of self pollution mentioned; in the Thirteenth, 145. I have examined reports from other States, and find a large per cent. attributed to this cause. But the melancholy reflection remains, that while so many are sent to our insane asylums, the great multitude of sufferers remain in their degradation at their homes, and will continue to pursue their loathsome vice until they are rescued or sink into their graves.

Hardly a newspaper is published in the country, but it records the death of some young persons by suicide. The frequency of these announcements, and the increasing number of self murderers, may well awake the solicitations of the philanthropist, and induce an investigation into the causes of such a state of things. There might be a shadow of excuse for the old and forsaken, the debauched, and wrecks of mankind to desire death, but none for the warm blooded, comely, companionable youth.

The evidences are abundant wherever examinations are made, and the physician who has not directed his attention to it will be astonished at the extent of this field of observation. The most deplorable and disastrous effects are all around: idiocy, dementia, monomania, catalepsy, paralysis, deformity of limbs, diseased eyes, blindness, loss of health, of life and soul. But enough has been said to satisfy the most incredulous that the effects of self pollution are terribly disastrous to children, and the effort to save them from such calamity is worthy any effort or sacrifice that patients, physicians, or philanthropists can make.

However much we may wish to conceal the fact, and draw over our seminaries of learning and common schools the mantle of pity or concealment, the facts are notorious that the vice exists in many, if not all, to a fearful extent. It may be a matter of policy with teachers and parents to cover up such a ruinous iniquity; but why cover up the destructive fire, which will assuredly break forth in a fearful and deadly conflagration?

If such a state of things exists, and parents and teachers and guardians are ignorant of it, it neither lessens the evil nor mitigates the wrong. The knowledge of such evils, the tendency of the mind of the young either instinctively or from tuition to practice such vices, should induce them be faithful and true guardians, and save the young from an evil which may destroy both body and mind.

Many parents and teachers will at once repel any such insinuation; they are so thoroughly convinced of the purity and chastity of those over whom they are guardians, that they are indignant at such suggestions, and yet it may be true of their wards as of any other. The secrecy and concealment of children under such circumstances is often most effectual, and nothing but a well arranged plan will detect the vice.

Dr. Howe, in one of his reports, says: "Many a child, who confides everything else to a loving parent, conceals this practice in its innermost heart. They strive to cheat and deceive by false appearances; for, as against this darling sin, duty, conscience, and religion



are all nothing. Many a fond parent looks with wondering anxiety upon the puny frame, the feeble purpose, the fitful humors of a dear child, and, after trying all other remedies to restore him to vigor of body and vigor of mind, goes journeying about from place to place, hoping to leave the offending cause behind, while the victim hugs the disgusting serpent closely to his bosom, and conceals it carefully in his vestment."

The observation and testimony of Dr. Howe is sufficient to sustain the charge against seminaries and schools, but his testimony is sustained by the evidence and observations of thousands who have passed through such allurements and vices.

The portraiture of self abuse is sad and repulsive to every finer feeling, and were we only permitted to look at its dark and cheerless contour, carrying away, as it does, the brightest hopes of thousands of our youth—were we compelled to listen to the pitiable sorrows of patients and friends, and see no ray of light, we might well despair of the future well-being of the children of those families; for the blackness and darkness would grow deeper and heavier, until every sound of joy would be hushed in silence. But there is a relief: the picture, though drawn in dark colors, has its rays of light, and joy and hope.

Were we strictly treating this subject in a medical point of view, we would refer to the various tissues which, when diseased, aid or are causes in the production of self pollution; but, as our aim is to interest public opinion in this matter, we omit noticing them; they are familiar to the mind of every physician.

#### TREATMENT.

The prevention or cure of masturbation, self abuse, self pollution, or onanism, is the great desideratum all wish to reach.

While such considerations are repulsive, and we instinctively shrink from the knowledge or consideration of them, it is ever an act of wisdom on the part of the parent or physician to check the evil, whatever may be the surroundings of the child. While we would heartily disapprove of any restraint which would burden the life of the child or restrain its pleasure, we would insist on some supervision to prevent the appearance of the evil, and think this supervision should commence at an early age.

The great point for our consideration is, how shall the habit of self pollution be corrected and prevented?

Can anything be done to stay its progress, and save the young men and women from the degradation which vice always brings with

it? The means of cure, or prevention, have engaged the attention of the profession only to a limited extent, and but little has been written on the subject, yet it is highly worthy the combined efforts of every philanthropist.

As I have elsewhere remarked, there is a moral sense in every one who is guilty of self pollution, that tells him it is wrong. Nature does not permit this invasion of her citadel, from whence springs the life of the race, without giving a premonition to the understanding and to the body, that such invasion is made at the greatest peril, and will eventuate in the ruin of mind and body. There is an intuitive sense of wrong, which, if the child is properly approached, easily yields to the warnings of a friend. A candid, firm, friendly accusation has, in my experience, been the best way of approaching a child suspected of the vice. Children at an early age are good readers of character, so that frankness, with kindness, will win the confidence of a child quicker than hardship and reproach. The confidence thus gained with the child is of the most confiding character, which gives the friend or physician a great and valuable power over the child, and enables him to guide his patient in a more virtuous course, and save him from ruin.

Corporal punishment and degradation have been resorted to, but in no instance on record has such a course been successful, but rather the very opposite.

The first step towards prevention or cure, is to ascertain the possibility of a local exciting cause, such as ascarides, irritation of the rectum, urethra, bladder, or bowels, or any general or special derangement of the body, the effects of which would excite a desire for self abuse.

When such causes exist, it would be idleness to appeal to the child's moral sense, or put it under restraint. I need hardly add that in many cases when these local causes are removed, the patient at once forsakes the filthy vice, without any desire to return to it. Another important inquiry is, to know whether the impulse to self abuse arises from any congenital taint, as there is indubitable evidence that the habit has been transmitted from parent to child; or whether it is the result of a depraved education; either case demands a careful consideration.

Lallemand says: "Steps should be at once taken to prevent masturbation, or the habit will become inveterate, and rapidly spread from one boy to another. Personal chastisement will not often avail. In the case of Rousseau, we know that flogging was the primary cause which excited emissions that finally became the bane of his



life. In infants, we must attempt to correct the habit by the ordinary mode of muffling the hands, or applying a sort of straight waistcoat; and the most careful watching will often fail in correcting the habit when once it has been engrafted, or when emissions have produced those changes in the urethra and its appendages, which we have seen keep up the complaint, and react on the brain; or which, having at first excited the boy's imagination, react again through the brain on the genito urinary system.

In the boy, it is of the utmost vital importance that the mind be directed into a different channel, and that every means be taken to check the secretion of semen. There is nothing so good as gymnastic exercises, regularly employed, and carried to an extent just short of fatigue. A taste should be encouraged for cricket, rowing, walking, swimming, and the usual feats of strength which are taught in a gymnasium. Under such training the secretion of semen will diminish; but still emissions will take place occasionally, until they finally disappear. If irritation or inflammation of the vesiculæ seminales exist, the appropriate remedies, to be hereafter spoken of, must be combined with gymnastic exercises. If we have reason to suspect any of the other local causes of irritation, such as stricture, hæmorrhoids, or fissure of the anus, these complaints must be at once attended to, without which we can not hope to cure the patient. I need not say that those interested in a youth should in the mildest but still in a firm way point out the consequences to which such habits lead; and he should be taught to look upon masturbation as a cowardly, selfish, debasing habit, one which precludes those who indulge in it from associating with boys of proper spirit, distinguished as they are for a love of manly amusements compatible with health.

Establish this feeling, at the same time that the surgeon remedies the mischief that has been done by previous excesses, and the system soon rallies, and a watch need now only be kept on the general health of the patient.

It is from the fault of parents, and those who direct the studies of youth, not attending to the commencement of this evil habit, that many a man's future career, commenced under the most favorable auspices, has been thwarted, and his physical powers and growth checked; which, by a little seasonable advice and judgment on the part of those who are the guardians of youth, could have been avoided or remedied.

Dr. Howe remarks: "Nothing is more false than the common

doctrine of delicacy and reserve in the treatment of this habit. All hints, all indirect advice, all attempts to cure it by creating diversions, will generally do nothing but increase the cunning with which it is concealed. The way is to throw aside all reserve; to charge the offense directly home; to show up its disgusting nature and hideous consequences in glowing colors; to apply the canterbury seething hot, and press it to the very quick, unspairingly and unceasingly. Acquaintance with such advice as this—such acquaintance, that is, as is gained by having it held up before the eyes in all its ugliness, can only serve to make it detested and avoided. Experience has shown that in ninety-nine cases in a hundred the existence of the vice was known to the young, but not known in its true deformity; and that in the hundredth, the repulsive character in which it was first presented made it certain that no further acquaintance with it would be sought."

Dr. M. Wilson remarks: "The treatment of onanism demands more than common care, on account of the serious injury it causes to the strength and constitution of the sufferer. It arises usually at an age and under circumstances in which it is unlooked for and unexpected; and previous to its discovery has often obtained a hold on the individual that renders it more than usually rebellious to treatment. When the habit is once contracted, there is every inducement in the sensations of the patient to pursue it. This habit originates when the mind is not sufficiently developed to comprehend its fatal tendency. When the practice is discovered, the patient should be watched; he should not be left alone; and all opportunity of solitary seclusion prohibited.

It is a prevailing opinion that the disease will prove of easy self correction when the mind begins to comprehend the degradation of the habit; and that as the child becomes older he will leave off the practice of his own accord. Nothing can be more fallacious than this supposition, and the reverse is more generally the case; the demand for the peculiar excitement becomes more urgent, and the moral disgrace lessens in his own eyes in proportion as the practice acquires an ascendancy over the mind. The endeavor to stay its progress, therefore, can not be too prompt or too energetic."

Other evidence might be adduced, but we presume the above is sufficient to give direction to the general treatment. We might also enter upon a strictly medical treatment of masturbation in its various phases, but the length of our paper forbids, besides the treatment is generally known to physicians. My great object has been to call the attention of the profession to the subject, as it is undoubt-



edly too much neglected by physicians, as well as parents and guardians.

Whatever means may be resorted to, or appliances made, to cure or prevent this vice among children, the physician's counsel and advice should be of the most confiding and candid character.

If children are permitted by their legal guardians to enter all the associations which have a tendency to divert the mind from principles of purest chastity, if their associations are with the vile and corrupt, if they are permitted to be with servants or employeès who are rude and vulgar, if obscene books and pictures, or books of a doubtful moral tendency, are the sources from which children draw their moral strength, if children are permitted to visit our book-stores and paper stands, and from the nude and debauched representations of impurity drink in the poison which blunts all the finer sensibilities, if an approximation to such pictures are to be found upon the soaps and perfumes of the toilet table, if such books and pictures are permitted to be circulated in our schools and seminaries, what could be expected but that corruption would be painted on and fixed in the soul of the child, and be reflected in its actions, habits; and vices? The guardian who permits the seeds of vice to be sown in the breast of his charge by any of the above means may be guilty of sending forth upon society a blight and curse and pest, of putting in peril the entire life of a human being, and jeopardizing its future and eternal interests.

It is undoubtedly the province of the physician to call attention to this subject, but unless there is a concert of action with them, on the part of parents and guardians, all efforts will fall to the ground as useless. The subject can not be treated with medicine alone; the physician, in this case, must bring to his aid the moral and social relations, as he is compelled to in many diseases. The moral sense must be brought to bear upon the question; the child, to be secured against the vice, must be educated to shun any and everything which partakes of obscenity or unchastity.

There should exist between the parent, child and physician an unreserved confidence, that the child may become acquainted with the dangerous and cruel degradation of the vice of masturbation. Thus may we hope, when intelligence on this subject becomes more generally diffused, insanity, idiocy, and dementia will diminish; then will there be less sorrow, fewer tears, and a higher social and moral state among the youth of our land.







